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News Hurts U.S. When Reports On CIA Cases

The first requirement for successful covert actions by the Central Intelligence Agency is usually that they remain just that — covert. So, when the details of the Reagan administration's plans for encouraging internal opposition to Libyan dictator Moammar Khadafy wind up spread across the pages of *The Washington Post*, as they did the other day, American interests suffer accordingly.

At last count, Mr. Khadafy was helping to finance as many as 30 terrorist organizations operating around the world. Whether in Lebanon, Nicaragua, the Philippines, South America, the Middle East, or Western Europe, the common denominator of these groups is hatred for the United States and violent opposition to American foreign policy. Increasingly, that opposition takes the form of deadly attacks upon Americans abroad.

During just the last three years, these attacks have killed hundreds of Americans, mostly in Lebanon but also elsewhere in the Middle East, in Europe, and in Central America. Clearly, then, the Reagan administration would be derelict in its duty if it were *not* seeking ways of countering Mr. Khadafy's role as paymaster, armorer, and ideological cheerleader for so many of the world's terrorists.

And what better way than to encourage dissident Libyans and some among Libya's nervous neighbors to undermine Mr. Khadafy's re-

gime themselves? Unfortunately, no sooner had the Reagan administration quietly embarked upon such a plan, and duly obtained agreement of the House and Senate intelligence committees, than the plan's essential details were betrayed. The leaker apparently was a disgruntled member or staff representative of the House Intelligence Committee.

This is an old game in Washington — leaking information to damage or discredit policies which one opposes. It was just such leaks that prompted Congress to reduce from eight to two the number of committees overseeing CIA operations. But even one committee or one State Department bureaucrat can be too many if disaffected officials feel free to sabotage any clandestine intelligence operation they oppose.

No wonder the White House is upset. And no wonder President Reagan ordered an immediate investigation to determine who divulged this information, which was undoubtedly covered by the very highest security classification.

The justification for conducting covert intelligence operations in today's lawless world is altogether compelling. There simply must be some option between doing nothing and going to war. That option is covert action. And, in the comparatively rare instances in which it is employed, its effectiveness depends on the government's ability to keep some minimal amount of information secret.